

OPEN SOURCE LEGAL DATABASE



Presented by Mariam Morshedi

Subscript

New Jersey Nonprofit

www.subscript.org

Introduction to myself and to Subscript

Founder – Mariam Morshedi

Background – civil rights law (low-income clients)

Goal – educate non-lawyers, all social classes

Motivation – Smart clients...



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Mt. Holly Gardens Citizens in Action v. Township of Mount Holly



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Mt. Holly Gardens Citizens in Action v. Township of Mount Holly



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Presentation Goals

Subscript's Path to Online Free Legal Education

Open Source:

- Benefits
- Challenges
- Essential Elements



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Subscript's Plan – the database

- The design should be intuitive
- Audience - people with a short attention span (online users)
- Contributors - Encourage lawyers (or other individuals with legal knowledge) around the nation to contribute on an open-source basis
- SEE [FIRST PLAN](#)



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Problems

After the site was programmed, [this](#) is how it looked.

- TOO COMPLEX
- TOO COMPLETE
- CONTRIBUTING COMMUNITY VS AUDIENCE – GOALS?



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Power of Open Source models.

- Power of Wiki models (not just Wikipedia) (18,000,000 entries)
- See this [list](#)
 - [Aboutus.com](#) (*info about websites*) (17,611,146)
 - *Chinese Encyclopedias*: Baidu Baike (2,878,123) and Baike.com (3,920,000)
 - *Lyricwiki* (1,737,000)
 - *Termwiki* (*words in different languages*) (1,417,806)
 - *Wikianswers* (11,265,000)
 - [Wikimapia](#) (13,300,000)
 - Wikisource (4,057,263)
 - Wikitree (genealogy) (11,148,296)

- Linux



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Wikipedia is truly unique.

- Many factors came together to turn Wikipedia into an amazingly successful online encyclopedia created entirely by volunteers...
- Site usage (popularity/access): #6 in visitor traffic (Alexa)
- Readership: 495 million
- Essential Elements...



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Essential Element: Community

A Particular Online Community

- Attraction from individuals (for audience and contributors):
 - active online
 - engaged in a particular network already: Slashdot
 - knowledgeable about certain substantive areas
 - knowledgeable about programming



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Essential Element: Ethos

Hacker Ethos

- *(free source licensing)*
- *“NPOV”*
- *No hierarchy attitude of Founder Jimmy Wales (Larry Sanger was “ousted”)*



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Essential Element: Familiarity

Format

- *The format had the familiarity of an encyclopedia*
- *People knew what it was meant to look like*



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Essential Element: Core Contributors

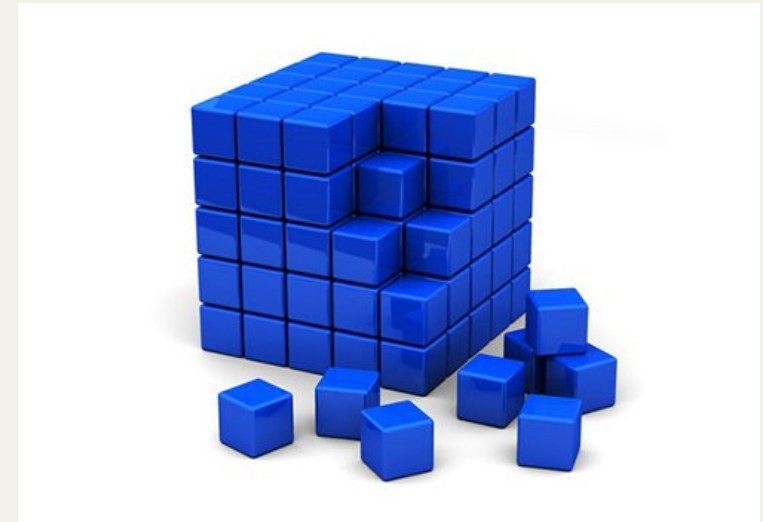
Core Contributors

- *over 50% of edits made by less than 1% of users*



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Essential Element: Bite-Sized Tasks



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Biggest Concern: Is Open Source Reliable?

Is Wikipedia Reliable?

- My view – depends on your goal. But generally, yes.



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Fact: Nature Magazine Study

- *Nature* Magazine compared 42 science entries in Wikipedia to *Britannica*
 - Found an average of 4 errors in Wikipedia, compared to Britannica's average of 3.
 - Britannica complained, saying the nature of the errors in Wikipedia are far worse...
 - But (missing the point) the errors cited on Wikipedia "have long since been fixed, while the Britannica errors remain."
-
- Don Tapscott and Anthony Williams, Wikinomics



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Ethos- Wikipedia says...



The biggest
mistake you
could ever make
is being too
afraid to make
one.

Fact: MIT study

- An obscenity randomly inserted on a Wikipedia article is removed in an average of 1.7 minutes



- *Related: Story about bots*
- Don Tapscott and Anthony Williams, [Wikinomics](#)



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Reliability: Consider your goal.

Are there some things that Wikipedia is good for? Yes.

Reader discretion in Yelp and Amazon reviews.



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Back to Subscript...

My goal is

NOT to teach people how to be lawyers,

BUT to give them a comprehension of the law that they did not understand before.



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Successful open-source-*ish* legal education models

Michigan – Lakeshore Legal Aid

Cornell – Legal Information Institute



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Subscript Plans

Working two angles...

- 1) Narrowing the community (prelaw students) to build existing site
- 2) Reinterpreting collaboration

MY FINAL LESSONS:

Do not reinvent the wheel
Collaboration takes many forms



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GROUPS - Choose a subject among your expertise most amenable to open source info gathering.

- 1) Community – merge audience and contributors
- 2) Existing resources - do not reinvent the wheel
- 3) Create an intuitive design (site or Google docs/sheets)
- 4) Network – is there an online active community?
- 5) Ethos – important if students are in community. Can it be separate from a grade? Can it be nonjudgmental? Oversight?



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